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DE RUEHB #1427/01 2961757

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P 231757Z OCT 09 ZDK CTG MULTIPLE SVC

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9593

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEFDHN/DIA DH WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 001427

NOFORN

SIPDIS

SECRET/NOFORN/ORCON; STATE PASS EUR/WE AND IO/UNP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/25/2019

TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR PHUM UN BE

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR GUTMAN'S OCTOBER 29 MEETING WITH
BELGIAN FM LETERME

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Classified By: Ambassador Gutman for reason 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (S//NF//ORCON) Summary: Ambassador Gutman met October 22 with Foreign Minister Leterme and his Chief of Staff Frans Van Daele. FM Leterme made a strong push for Louis Michel for the next UNGA presidency. Ambassador Gutman questioned Michel's friendliness to the U.S. Van Daele termed the U.S. perception a misreading, noting how close Michel was to former Secretary of State Powell and the praise he received for keeping a reference to Israel out of the first Durban Conference declaration. The Ambassador made no commitment beyond looking into the background. Leterme also raised Belgian citizens' concerns with the Cuba 5. Ambassador Gutman thanked the GOB for its cooperation on Guantanamo; at this point, he suggested we attempt to handle the Tunisian detainees as a Justice matter, allowing the MFA to focus on other detainees. The Ambassador also addressed Belgian concerns on The Terrorist Financing Tracking Program (TFTP), saying that the EU was concerned with data safeguards and that he also viewed TFTP as a Justice matter. The Ambassador told Leterme he would like to see Belgium's stature rise, noting the GOB could do more in helping close Guantanamo and asked Belgium to fill gaps left by the Germans and Dutch in Afghanistan. End Summary.

Introduction

¶2. (C) Ambassador Gutman worked to develop a closer working relationship during his official courtesy call with FM Leterme on October 22. FM Leterme was joined by Chief of Staff Frans Van Daele during the cordial meeting. Leterme had recently returned from the Taskforce on International Financial Transaction for Development and said the main topic was the Tobin tax on speculative currency transactions but said Israel was discussed as well. Leterme asked the Ambassador to attend the November 11 Armistice Day event in Ieper. Leterme raised Belgian citizens' concerns with the detention of the "Cuba 5" now serving varying prison terms in the United States (Gerardo Hernandez, Antonio Guerrero, Ramon Labanino, Fernando Gonzalez, and Rene Gonzalez) for a variety of crimes.

UNGA Presidency

¶3. (C) FM Leterme said Belgium wanted U.S. support for Belgian Louis Michel's candidacy for the UNGA presidency from 2010-2011. Ambassador Gutman said the Michel era (Note:

Michel served as FM from 1999-2004. End Note) was not a positive one for U.S. - Belgian relations. Van Daele replied that though the period was not ideal, implicating Louis Michel as the reason would be a misreading of events. Van Daele said Michel was close to former Secretary of State Colin Powell, and asked Ambassador Gutman to meet with him. The Ambassador underscored that the U.S. was unhappy with Belgium's abstention on the Goldstone Report. Van Daele said Michel was personally responsible for keeping a reference to Israel out of the first Durban Conference on Racism declaration, and always made a point of meeting Democrats. The Ambassador made no commitment beyond looking into the background.

Guantanamo

¶4. (C) Ambassador Gutman thanked FM Leterme for Belgium's assistance in accepting a Guantanamo refugee. Leterme and Van Daele both agreed all had gone well with the transfer. Leterme asked about the Tunisians, and Ambassador Gutman said he had discussed the issue that morning with JustMin De Clerck and the U.S. Department of Justice. He suggested that successful cooperation between the Ministry and Department of Justice on this issue would allow the MFA to focus on other detainees.

TFTP

¶5. (S//NF//ORCON) The Ambassador raised the challenge of finding a solution for TFTP. Leterme commented that under Belgian law, there was a problem with requesting large batches of data. Ambassador Gutman said the U.S. was only

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searching for focused data within the larger batches supplied by Swift's systems. In response to concerns of Belgium being in the lead, Ambassador Gutman noted it was the EU seeking the data and Belgium simply facilitated the EU requests. He said he would follow up with Justice Minister De Clerck and Chief Prosecutor Delmulle to eliminate political pressure on the MFA.

Ambassador Gutman's Goal for Belgium

¶6. (C) Ambassador Gutman said he would like Belgium to do more in closing Guantanamo, and he asked that Belgium step up to fill the gaps in Afghanistan that may be created if other European partners falter. He suggested it would be a wonderful opportunity for Belgium to increase its prominence and that both issues were of critical importance to his President and country. Leterme agreed with the Ambassador to continue to explore what Ambassador Gutman characterized as "win-win situations."

BIO

¶7. (C) Leterme is a passionate fan of the soccer team Standard Liege. Liege is a Walloon city, and Leterme supports the team even though he hails from Flanders where he is one of the most popular politicians. Ambassador Gutman and FM Leterme agreed to attend a match on a particular day in January.

GUTMAN

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